



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY



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October 15, 2008

A Green Neighborhood Watch?

As those in law enforcement know well, community policing is one of the most effective tools to combat crime. It's a smart idea to put law enforcement resources out into neighborhoods in order to understand local problems to prevent crime before it happens and be more responsive once it occurs. In fact, volunteer neighborhood watch programs have long been a cornerstone of efforts to build safer communities.

The same kind of neighborhood watch idea should hold true for environmental law enforcement as well. When I was a prosecutor, some of my most important cases came from citizen complaints, those who saw violations of law and brought them to the enforcement officer's attention.

The difference between traditional criminal law enforcement and environmental violations though is that many environmental violations are not self evident to the average citizen. That means that once more people understand why these kinds of violations are harmful and how they can help identify them, we potentially have more concerned citizens who can assist environmental enforcement officials carry out their duties.

Developing that broader and deeper public understanding is a long term project, but we are off to a good start with the development of the first ever state-wide approved environmental education curriculum. Called the Environmental Education Initiative (EEI), beginning next year we have available to school districts across the state an approved K-12 curriculum that will help our kids, teachers and parents better understand the environment and how our behaviors affect it. With that developing understanding, more citizens can help us identify violations so that enforcers can act appropriately to protect us, our environmental and a level playing field for the business community that plays by the rules. You can find out more about the EEI at: <http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Education/EEI/>.

As our education system evolves to produce more students who will go to college to invent more energy and environmental solutions, we will also need to do better at engaging young people who are not going to college to enter the workforce in ways that can green our communities. One opportunity under consideration is to work with the California Gang Reduction, Intervention and Prevention program to match more young people to serve in programs like the California Conservation Corps to performing tasks that improve our environment. Such projects could include building bike paths to keep cars off the road, clearing stream beds to prevent flooding, building parks and planting trees to beautify our communities and absorb carbon. Some have even suggested that such a force could be molded into a group of energy assessment helpers who could assist Californians to assess their energy usage home by home and help encourage Californians to "plug up the energy leaks", saving citizens money, reducing our carbon emissions and requiring us to build fewer power plants as California grows.

The point is, effective enforcement will require a team effort; citizens reporting violations, students understanding what's at stake, our best and brightest inventing energy and efficiency fixes and the rest of

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us implementing the many steps necessary to transform our state and nation into a cleaner, more energy independent and prosperous place to live.

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